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# AN INCOMPARABLE PROPHET GURU AMAR DASS (1479 - 1574)



By :

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# **AN INCOMPARABLE PROPHET**

**Guru Amar Dass (1479-1574)**

*Bhai Sahib Sirdar Kapur Singh*

Guru Amar Dass, Nanak the Third, is referred to as "an incomparable prophet" in the Sikh scripture<sup>1</sup>, not in the sense of unparalleled qualitative superiority or imperial spiritual status, for, according to Sikh doctrines there is no social hierarchy in the world of the Spirit and no gradation of excellence or rank amongst God's prophets or men otherwise 'filled with God', the Sikh scripture refers to all true prophets and men filled with the Holy Spirit, as 'co-equal and entitled to utmost reverence'<sup>2</sup>. But there are differences of identity and in the aroma of the time-climate in which the prophets and the messengers of God manifest themselves and operate. It is in this sense that Guru Amar Dass is referred to as 'incomparable' in the *Guru Granth*. The epiphany of the spiritual effulgence of Guru Amar Dass occurred in the second half of the 16th Century when, in an obscure corner of India, he appeared in the religious firmament of the world as a quasar, quasi-star but has been commonly regarded as a mere asteroid. A 'quasar' is a distinct heavenly body distinguishable by its extraordinary radio-action, smaller than galaxies, yet emitting many million times of energy released by any ordinary star. A

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1. *Bhalla Amardas gunu tere teri upma tohi ban avai.*

2. *Nanak vechara kia kahai, sabh lok salahai ek sai, siru Nanak loka pav hai, balihari jao jete tere nav hai.*

quasar is incredibly luminous though such steller objects are estimated to be about 5,300 million light-years away from us, while an asteroid or planetoid is just a junior member of our own solar system, just a little planet. Those who like to view Guru Nanak in his ten manifestations as *bhaktas* of Hindu vaishnavite tradition or 'sants' in the sense of highly pious Hindus, confuse a quasar with an asteroid. Nor is Guru Nanak, in any of his Manifestations, to be judged merely by their historical impact on society or history, for, we must not reduce religion to social revolutionary Marxism. As the famous Christian theologian, Harnack has said,<sup>3</sup>

*"He already wounds religion who primarily asks what it has achieved for culture and progress of mankind and wants, accordingly, to determine its value. The meaning of life unfolds always in the supra-worldly spheres."*

"It is in the supra-world that true worth of man is adjudged", according to the Sikh Scripture,<sup>4</sup> for, "here it is pitch dark night and there the shining light of the day"<sup>5</sup>, wherein alone the meaning of life and death are clearly seen.

## II

In this parameteral plane it is proposed to refer briefly to the following points and facets of Nanak, the third -, Guru Amar Dass, in this monograph :

1. A capsule-biography of Guru Amar Dass.
2. Ontological status of the Sikh Gurus in the Sikh dogmatics and the true place of Sikhism in the World of Religion.

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3. Adolf von Harnack, *Die Mission*, 1902.

4. *kac pakai othai pae*.

5. *othe dinh ethai sabh rat*.

3. Distinctive contributions of Guru Amar Dass to religious thought and ecclesiastical matters, such as, (a) his exegesis of the specific component, ananda, joy, bliss, of the Hindu comprehension of absolute Reality, *sat-cit-anand*, that is, truth-consciousness-bliss, (b) his new psycho-somatic understanding of 'food' with its social implications, (c) his deeper interpretation of the Hindu ideal of a 'virtuous wife', *sati*, (d) his estimation of the female-principle in woman in relation to her capacity and eligibility to religious experience in its fullness and participation in religious practices and ritual, her right to preach religion and her right to administer ecclesiastical and church affairs.

4. Finally, his ideas about 'revelation' and 'literature', and his peculiar literary craftsmanship.

### III

Guru Amar Dass was born on May 5, 1479. His occupation as secular man was agriculture and petty trade. He married at the age of 24 and had two sons and two daughters. He was a staunch vaishnavite Hindu who annually went on pilgrimage to Haridwar to have a dip in the Ganga and he practised austerities and regularly performed religious rituals befitting a pious Hindu. It was rather late in life that he came in contact with Nanak, the second, Guru Angad, and was eventually consecrated as Nanak, the Third, as Guru Amar Dass in the year 1552.

For 22 years of his remaining life he preached religion and organised Sikh religious affairs with unremitting zeal and unabating exertion and the obscure village of Goindwal, near Amritsar, became, elevated to the 'Acropolis of God' in popular estimation,

as the Sikh Scripture records.<sup>6</sup> In the Sikh World this village became adjudged as "the Axle around which Sikhism revolves and moves forward."<sup>7</sup> Here Sikhs congregated from far and near and here princes and princesses, Muslims and Hindus, Emperor Akbar and the Raja of Haripur, Kangra came to pay homage to the Guru.

Here Guru Amar Dass established his open free kitchen that served food to visitors round the clock and the Guru made it obligatory for every visitor to him to have food in this Eating House, (*langar*,) before coming to his presence, and the Emperor and the prince, the rich and the poor, the high caste and the low caste, all complied with this requirement.

Here the Guru had excavated and constructed a splendacious and covered, domed and bricked, huge water-reservoir, the *Baoli*, that remains firm as rock after four centuries of wear and tear, in itself no mean engineering feat that compares favourably with many of our present day 'Five-Year Plans' achievements in durability and functional utility. It also is revered as a sacred place of pilgrimage for ritual bathing for those who understand the intimate initiatory relationship between water and religious quest.

It was here that the Guru provided a solid organisational base to the Sikh church by imparting to it the permanent character that parallels but does not enter into direct rivalry with the political state and which upholds and proclaims the primacy of moral obligations and spiritual necessities of man over the coercive and merely utilitarian power and goals of the political state. He set up twenty-two bishoprics, *manjis*, co-extensive in jurisdiction with the 22 administrative regions of the contemporary Mughal Indian empire, and women were ordained and included amongst these

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6. *Goindwal gobindpuri sam*.

7. *Goindwal Sikhi da dhura*.

Sikh bishops, conferring on them the right and authority to preach and administer religion and ecclesiastical affairs.

Here God, in His discretion and pleasure, communicated with man, through the Word of the Guru, 'by filling the Guru's personality with His Presence'<sup>8</sup>, to make the basic distinction between 'revelation' and 'literature' by assigning the former the validity of true guidance for man in matters of his ultimate concern.

Here, the Word of the Guru, clearly distinguished the Sikh mysticism of Personality from the hitherto accepted, the Jainist and Buddhist mysticism of Infinity, the one that aims at denial to one's self so as to become the channel of Divine Love, the vehicle of God's will, and the other that aims at complete, utter and irrecoverable annihilation of personality, *mukti nirvana*.

Here the Guru deepened and spiritualised the fundamental social rituals and ceremonies of birth, death and marriage by extricating them from the control and strangle-hold of a hereditary and genetic priesthood of *brahmins* and by integrating them to the Sikh spiritual discipline for human enlightenment.

Here he issued the stern Ordinance forbidding monasticism and *renunciation* of the world for a man of religion, and thus emphasised the centrality of activism and worldaffirmation in Sikhism.

Here, at Goindwal, Guru Amar Dass, passed away on September 1, 1574 after appointing and anointing his successor and after admonishing Sikhs 'not to view death with sorrow and grief<sup>9</sup> but to know it as a stage and station in the continuing evolution and progress of human soul.

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8. *gur vic ap smoe sabad vartaia.*

9. *"mat main picche ko rovasi so main mul na bhaia."*

## IV

There is one dogma and one scientific truth without accepting and understanding both of which, Sikhism cannot be properly appreciated. There are two approaches to understand and appreciate a religion, one valid and legitimate and the other invalid and arbitrary. The valid approach is that of auto-interpretation, that is, interpretation according to the basic postulates and doctrines of that religion itself, and the arbitrary and presumptuous approach is that of hetero-interpretation, that seeks to evaluate and judge a religion according to postulates and norms alien or hostile to it. This latter is the domain of polemics and confrontation and not of understanding and appreciation. Hetero-interpretation is, in the poetic imagery of the *Gitanjali* by Rabindranath Tagore, as if "a jeweller has come to the garden to test excellence of rose-flower by rubbing it against his touch-stone." In Sikhism, auto-interpretation of a religion alone is approved. The Sikh Scripture lays down that, "a sympathetic approach towards a religion is alone fruitful and satisfying, while an attitude of acrimony and fault-finding is frustrative and self-stultifying."<sup>10</sup> The Sikh *Formularies* sternly declare "a fault-finding approach towards other religions as anathema".<sup>11</sup> The fundamental dogma of Sikhism and its epiphany is that all the historical Manifestations of Sikh Gurus, the Ten Nanaks, constitute one identical Personality in continuous movement through ten corporealities, as God of Sikhism is a God of revelation who, on His own initiative presses towards revealing Himself. This dogma is the starting point of Sikhism and is fundamental to its understanding and practice. A dogma is a body

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10. *khoji upajai badi binasai.*

11. *avar jagat panthan hain jete, karē ninda nahi kababun tete.*

—Chaupa Singh.

of teachings necessary for salvation, rejection of which constitutes adamantine impediment to spiritual progress. It is in this sense that Guru Gobind Singh, Nanak the Tenth, proclaims that without accepting and understanding this dogma, "a Sikh never achieves spiritual fulfilment."<sup>12</sup> Bhai Gurdas (1551-1639), an unimpeachable authority on Sikhism, clearly tells us that every historical manifestation of the Nanak is merely a change in corporeality without infringement of the identity of personality."<sup>13</sup> Mohsin Fani, a Zoroastrian contemporary of Nanak, the Sixth (1595-1649) on the basis of correspondence with the Guru, specifically mentions the Sikh dogma as fundamental to Sikhism.<sup>14</sup> The dogma is reiterated in numerous texts of the Guru Granth.<sup>15</sup>

## V

The scientific fact about Sikhism is that it is neither a syncretism, an amalgam and intellectual extraction from other religions and creeds nor a sect of Hinduism or Islam as has been variously asserted from time to time by numerous authorities. It is an autonomous, independent religion, complete and whole, with its validity inhering in its own revelations and proclamations such as are repeatedly made in the Sikh Scripture, its pious literature and its historical movement. The newly developed Science of Religion and its critique categorises all higher world-religions into the Mystic religions and the Prophetic religions. The basis of Mystic religions is anonymous experiences of individuals, while the

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12. *bin jane sidhi hath na ai.*

13. *Arjan kaia palat ke murat Hargobind svari.*

14. *Dabistan-e-mazahib, (1645)*

15. *Ramdasi guru jag taran kau gur jot Arjan mahi dhari.*

Prophetic religions arise out of a confrontation of an individual, the Prophet, with God in the relationship of 'I and Thou', in the phraseology made famous by Martin Buber (1878-1965). As an authority on the subject explains it.

*"What is important in mystical acts is that something happens. What is important in prophetic acts is that something is said"<sup>16</sup>.*

The religions taking their birth in the Middle East, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam are 'prophetic' religions while those arising in India, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism are mystic or speculative religions. Sikhism is the only 'prophetic' religion that ever arose in India and the question of its sectarian or subordinate character and status in relation to any Indian religion, therefore, simply cannot arise in any scientific judgement. This position is repeatedly asserted in the sacred texts of the *Guru Granth* itself.

## VI

Mysticism, in the sense of contact with an extra sensory Order of Reality, is the core of all higher religions. After the Second World War, there have been extensive and serious speculations on the modes and contents of mystical experience, in Europe that still overwhelms the East's Euro-centred mental horizons on account of its political strength and superiority of technological power. This activity has arisen out of two different and independent thrusts of, scientific enquiry and philosophic speculation, after both of these mighty movements of human mind reached a kind of *cul-de-sac*, a point beyond which no further travel for the human intellect seems possible. The shift of sciences

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16. Abraham J. Herschel, *"The Prophets,"* 1963.

into an altogether autonomous sphere after release from the shackles of theology, that of experimental experience and research, had the human intellect seems possible. The shift of sciences into an altogether autonomous sphere after release from the shackles of theology, that of experimental experience and research, had led to a world-outlook based on rational scientific concepts, in the 18th century. This is called the "first illumination" by the creative leading intellectuals. Now, during the last two decades or so, notable scientists of the 20th century, such as Albert Einstein, Max Born, Max Planck and Niels Bohr have admitted and declared the religious background of their concepts of life, of the Universe and the man. "My religion", says Albert Einstein, "consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble minds." Thrusts into cosmos undertaken through the modern development of astronautics, by the U. S. A. and U. S. S. R. have contributed to elimination of the geo-centric conception of the world which, until 1960's and early 1970's lay at the basis of naive religious thinking. These space programmes have also contributed to preparing the way for new religious feelings, for the world, and for the life by, recognition of the unique position of man and his religion in human concerns. This feeling is adumbrated in the holy *Koran* (51 : 57) wherein the ultimate purpose of creation is declared as worship of God, and this feeling is explicitly asserted in the concluding *sloku* of the *Japu* wherein our earth is spoken of as the locus of Drama and the play of Good and Evil implicating ethical activity as the central concern of man. In philosophy, its classical tool, human reason, was first devalued by the English philosopher. David Hume (1711-1776) in his *Treatise of Human Nature* wherein he showed that the truths of reason are true merely by definition, like

mathematics but that the truths of the world we live in are based on experience instead of logic. This gave birth to two directions to philosophical speculation, one pursued by Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Jean Paul Sartre who hold that the only knowledge worth having is knowledge that bears directly on the human experience, and the other direction taken up has flowered into Analytical Philosophy which limits the role of reason to logic and mathematics and thus restricts philosophy's concern with the meaning, structure and precision of language. The seminal figures of Analytical Philosophy are Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein who, the last named, used to describe his philosophy, when your today's speaker was his student at Cambridge during the thirties, as "the philosophy to end all philosophy." When pointed out that it was likely to create a serious unemployment problem for the philosophers, his reply was, "Why, there is the mystic experience." About this mystic experience Albert Einstein says that, "the most beautiful and most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical, It is the sower of all true science." Sigmund Freud and Karl Jung dealt the *coup-de-grace* to all rational truth-finding speculations by showing that human reason was a false coin, essentially a tool of human passions, a sycophant and a courtier and no more trustworthy. It is in this background that the recent poignant and intense interest in Mysticism and the date of mystical experiences throughout the ages, available for study, has arisen in the recent decades of the 20th century. Drug-culture of the modern younger generation, hippies, beatniks the flower-children, is a fascinating product and aberration of these trends in the domains of Science and Philosophy. This 'drug culture' has its roots in the scientific and philosophic stalemate in the Western psyche and arises out of a quest and yearning for new

experiences and expanded consciousness. This is the "second illumination" of man, after the sway of rationalism of the 18th and 19th centuries that urges him to interest himself in mysticism and beckons him to a return to religion.

## VII

The new understanding of the age-old mystic experience of man, much data about which is available for serious study in the Hindu sacred texts of *upanishads* and *vedanta* and Buddhist texts of Mahayan of Indian and Far Eastern origin, along with the records left by and pertaining to the great medieval and modern Christian mystics as well as the prestigious Sufi tradition of Islam, reveals that mystical goals are of two categories, distinct and distinguishable, one of the Mystic religions and the other of Prophetic religions. Reynold Nicholson while explaining the nature and goal of Islamic mysticism makes the point clear by saying that,

*"unlike nirvana which is merely the cessation of individuality. the fana, passing away of the sufi from his phenomenal existence involves baqa, the continuance of his real existence and personality. He who dies to self lives in God, and fana, the consummation of his death, marks the attainment of baqa, or union with the divine life."*<sup>17</sup>

The goal of Sikh mysticism as revealed in the *Guru Granth* and the *Dasamgranth* of Guru Gobind Singh, is indubitably the goal of baqa of Sufi mysticism, not irrecoverable dissipation and merger of personality in the neutral Absolute Reality, the *brahma*, through *nirvana* and *mukti*, but the perpetuation of personality,

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17. *The Mystics of Islam*. 1921.

through its phenomenal death and by its rise into unison with the Person of God, so that the liberated soul, the *brahmagyani* becomes a vehicle of God's Will in transcendent relationship as well as in the creative process of God. That is what is meant when the *Guru Granth* says that "a liberated soul is filled with zeal of cosmic welfare."<sup>18</sup> That is what is meant when in the *Dasamgranth* Guru Gobind Singh says that though he had "achieved complete and full unison with God."<sup>19</sup>, and yet the Divine Command sent him back to earth to carry out God's purpose of "propagating good and destroying evil."<sup>20</sup> This ultimate concern of man according to Sikhism, the goal of establishing permanent unison with the Transcendent Reality, the Person of God, *Akalpurkh*, clearly separates and distinguishes Sikhism, as a religion, apart from and independent of the Hindu and Buddhist spiritual tradition. The claim of Sikhism as an independent and autonomous, world-religion is no naive or empty boast of a presumptuous claim, and it is a demonstrably valid and scientific assertion. There are no songs of *nirvana* in the Sikh doctrine and no hungering for peace of nothingness, utter death, emptiness and immobile little rest or *shantih* here.

*"Nor scattering of personality or cleavage of 'individuality', karvatra, to achieve submergence into the sum-total of eternal substances, Brahman, is the acceptable goal in Sikhism, nor unrealisable and ever unfulfilled human yearning for an utterly inaccessible God is the Sikh doctrine and Vision of religious quest; but an abiding unison of the nature of a love-duet between man and God, God the Creator of the mortal man and the*

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18. *brahamgyani paraopkar omaha.*

19. *dvai te ek rup hvai gaio.*

20. *dharam calavan sant ubaran, dust sabhan mul uparan.*

*immortal Brahman, atamattava, both, is the teaching of Sikhism."*<sup>21</sup>

## VIII

From this concept of Sikh *summum bonum* follows the new definition and content that Guru Amar Dass imparted to the fundamental concept of Absolute Reality, conceived as *sat-cit-ananda* in Hindu spiritual tradition. True understanding and pursuit of this last component of Absolute Reality, *ananda*, has engaged Hindu mind throughout the ages conceiving of it as the seed-less and featureless trance where the mind, in its utter unflickering emptiness, is, somehow, aware of this unsullied and altogether un-related nothingness and, in another way, relating it to pure bodily well-being *pushitimarag*, or the mystic thrill of sex experience. Our modern sarvant, Aurobindo, in his, *Life of Divine* quotes *Taitreyaopanisad* with approval where it is said :

*"Delight is existence, delight is the secret of creation, delight is the root of birth, is the cause of remaining in existence, delight is the end of birth and that in which creation ceases."*

Modern British Philosopher F. H. Bradley (1846-1924) in his *Appearance and Reality*, asserts that, "the Perfect means the identity of idea and existence accompanied by pleasure."

Serious reflection, however, would show that these three components or characteristics of the Absolute Reality, no matter

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21. *karvatu bhala na karvat teri  
lag gale sun benati meri  
haun vari mukh pher piare,  
karvat de mo ko kahe ko mare.*

—Guru Granth, Asa-Kabir.

how intimately fused into one another to form a single whole, the last one of these components cannot conceivably exist without inhering in a 'person'. Though Being, *sat*, can be independent of Consciousness, *cit*, and can exist in its own right, and though *cit* may likewise exist without the surrogate of and direct alliance with *sat*, the Being, ananda, joy, bliss, simply cannot exist except as a deposit in the receptacle of consciousness which postulates a 'person'. Consciousness itself, the greatest mystery that man encounters, may be conscious of nothing else but itself but that leads to, what the philosophers call, 'infinite' regression', implicating that the consciousness that is conscious of itself, must, in some definite sense, be other than "itself" of which it is conscious. Thus one never can grasp the starting point of this regression, unless a 'person' is postulated as the safe-deposit receptacle of this consciousness. Ananda, in order to be conceived at all, must be known by that which is other than ananda, a 'person', or else it makes no sense. Ananda must be known by a '*person*', though *sat* and *cit* do not suffer from this incurable pre-requisite disability, for them to exist. It follows that, in the Mysticism of infinity, there just can not be ananda, while in the Mysticism of Personality, all the three components of the Absolute Reality achieve viability and validity. It was this point which Guru Amar Dass elucidated with remarkable lucidity in his Revelation, *Anandu Ramkai*, in the *Guru Granth* :

*"There has been much speculation about what anandu is, but the Word of the Guru now makes the matter clear. The Anandu is to be ever with God, the gift of His Grace and mark of His love.*

*God, in His Mercy, destroys the impurities and limitations of the human ego and bestows upon him the true*

*knowledge and everlasting existence. The man when freed from the gravitational pull of the world of corruption becomes weightless and purified with Truth, that is, the Word.<sup>22</sup>*"

This is the *anandu* taught by Sikhism.

## IX

The ancient and prestigious *chhandogyaopanishad* tells us that, "human mind is made up of food" that man consumes, *annamayamhi manah*. In the Hindu schemata of psychology, body, *shrir*, consciousness, *cita*, and mind, *manah*, are the basic constituents of human personality. While the body is created and is perishable, the soul is imperishable. The *cita* is the result of past *karma* and mind is material, created by the food, a man consumes. Thus, food acquires a central, soteriological significance in human life, since the *karma* follows the mind in this life, and the deposit of *karma* in previous births determines the course of transmigration, the circle of births and deaths, the curse of cyclic existence, a release, *mukti*, from which is the *Hindu summum bonum*. Thus the food, that a man eats, acquires a peculiar centrality of significance in the Hindu scheme of things that constitute his ultimate concern, and those who misconceive Hindu scruples about food as grounded in his sense of superiority over others are altogether mistaken. For a Hindu, food is not primarily a matter of physical nourishment, as he views it as the

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22. *Anandu anandu sabh ko kahai anandu gur te Jania.*

*jania anandu sada gur te kirpa kare piaria*  
*Kari kirpa kilabikhu kate gian anjan saria*  
*andarahu jin ka mohu tuta tin ko sabad sace saria*  
*kahai Nanaku ihu anandu hai anandu gur te jania.*

primary source of psychic influences on his mind and thus a matter of extreme spiritual concern. What, how and where he eats is a matter of his private religion and not a matter of lack of feelings of human brotherliness in him. It is an unfortunate and thoroughly mistaken notion that Hindu commensality, the rule that food is to be eaten and received only in the presence of members of a certain group, is either disregard of others' human dignity or simple xenophobia, an irrational hatred for the foreigner. In this background the Hindu has classified "food" in accordance with the three Fundamental Modalities of All that Exists, the three *gunas* of the ancient Samkhya system, the *sattava*, the *rajas* and the *tamas*. The first represents harmony, clarity and equipoise; the second, dynamism and activity, and the third, lassitude and confusion. All Existence is modulated and regulated, in varying, degrees, by these three *gunas*. The most desirable food, therefore, for a Hindu is the *sattava*-based food. In *Bhagvadagita* the *sattava* foods are described as those that are sweet in taste, luscious and delicious to the palate and giving a feeling of easement when consumed. The Indian preference for *rashgullas*, *gulabjamins*, *halwa* and sweet *pulao* on our menu derives from this ancient Hindu insight into the relationship between food and mind and not because they are adjudged as health-foods or of weight-control caloric value. There are three blemishes as render a food unacceptable to a Hindu : *jatidosha*, uncivil and barbaric qualities of the food itself, such as onion and garlic, *sthandosha*, public and open to the gaze of strangers while being consumed and lastly, *nammitadosha*, arising out of who cooked the food, who touched it and from where it came. It was in the context of these hoary traditions and notions that Guru Amar Dass set up his institution of free common kitchen. The *langar*, now deemed as a necessary adjunct of every sizable Sikh Gurdwara. The Guru made partaking of food in his

*langar* as a prerequisite condition for seeking his audience and coming to his presence. The king and the prince, the rich and the pauper, the high caste and the low caste, the Hindu and the Muslim, all had to, and as the chroniclers tell us did comply willingly with this requirement. A Hindu common kitchen wherein all must eat together is simply unthinkable, while there did exist, in medieval, India, the institution of free and common kitchens maintained by Muslim sufi *darveshas* and holy men. It is on records<sup>23</sup> that Khwaja Nizamuddin Aulia, following the precedent of his spiritual master, Sheikh Farid Shakaraganj, always insisted on a visitor to take food first in his kitchen and then come to his presence. The Aulia often used to quote a *hadith* that says that, "he who paid a visit to a living person but took no food there, in fact, visited a dead man." But the institution of Sikh *langar* which Guru Amar Dass perpetuated is distinct and distinguishable in principle and objectives from this Muslim practice of a free kitchen. In three respects the institution of the Sikh *langar* is altogether a novel and revolutionary phenomenon in the history and climate of India : (1) The essence of the Sikh *langar* is not essentially hospitality such as has made Muslim tradition of hospitality famous throughout the world and such as characteristically distinguishes the Muslim human type from most other races and communities of the world. In the Sultanate period in Delhi, it is recorded that, a noted Muslim divine used to walk daily through the streets of the town, chanting : "O Muslims, be true Muslims; sell away all your possessions to practice generous hospitality."<sup>24</sup> In the case of the Sikh *langar* the food offered is essentially a trans-substantiated host, symbolising Sikh doctrine of universal

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23. *Favaid-ul-Fuad*.

24. *ai mussalmanan mussalmani kuned,  
khanch bifirushedo mehmani kuned.*

brotherhood of man. (2) The Sikh doctrine relates 'food', as such, to nutrition and health, regarding it as a gift from God and disassociates it from the Hindu view of food as the core of psychic life and religious practices. (3) The Sikh doctrine compresses the concept of food-blemishes to just one comprehensive blemish, that the food eaten must be clean, health-promoting and obtained through just and fair means. All these revolutionary ideas Guru Amar Dass propagated and integrated to the Sikh way of life.

## X

'Sati' literally means 'one wedded to truth' and its accepted meaning is 'a virtuous wife.' From times immemorial, in our country, it has been recognised as the true test of a sati that she cremates her living body along with that of her dead husband. The premier and ancient *Brahmapurana* lays it down as "the highest duty of the woman to immolate herself after her husband, since this is commanded by the *Veda* as a path greatly reputed in all the worlds."<sup>25</sup> The Greek and the Muslim invaders into India, during the last 24 centuries have been amazed and awestruck with this custom of *sati* and have viewed it both as a high water mark of human faith fidelity and as an ignoble custom and dreadful barbarity. Diodorus Siculus, the Greek writer of the 2nd century B. C. cynically refers to this custom as "an insurance against the untimely death of husbands," insinuating it as a common practice in ancient India for men to be poisoned by their women-folk. The sensitive Muslims saw in *sati* a stunning example of undying human love and unconquerable human faith: "Where else in the

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25. *satrinamyam parodharma yadbharatu anuvesnam, vede ca vihito margah sarva lokeshy pujitah*--80, 75.

world, except in the case of a Hindu woman can you find such sublimity of love which expresses itself by dying with the dead!<sup>26</sup> The foreign rulers in India, viewing the custom, generally, as inhuman and repugnant to conscience have tried to discourage or suppress it through coercive power of the state. The Portuguese, in the first half of the 16th century, made *sati* illegal in Goa. Emperor Akbar disapproved of it in the Institutes of his newfangled religion, *dini-ilahi* but promulgated no state-law to forbid it. Jehangir, in his early rule, found new converts to Islam practising *sati* in the Himalayan foothills and sternly forbade it. Shah Jehan made it illegal for *sati* to be performed near Muslim cemeteries. Aurangzeb, in 1664 A. D., issued an edict forbidding *sati* throughout his dominions but his Government found itself powerless to enforce it. Lord Willian Bentick, by Madras regulation 1 of 1829, declared *sati* illegal in Bengal and punishable by criminal courts. *Sati* continued in Punjab upto its annexation of the British Empire in 1849. But such is the pull and thrill of the mystique of *sati* to the Hindu mind that the practice has staged a nostalgic comeback here and there, after the British left India in 1947, Guru Amar Dass made a seminal pronouncement on the subject of *sati* by deepening its spiritual significance and annulling its draconic requirement of cremation of the living wife. His relevant revelation in the Guru Granth declares :

*"A virtuous wife is not one who burns herself alive with her dead husband. She indeed, would be a sati who dies through shock of separation. But, says Nanak, a true sati is she who bears the shock of separation with courage and lives her natural span of life in a disciplined,*

26. *cun zane hindu kase dar ashqi diwana nist, sukhtan bar shama-i-murdeh kare har parvaneh nist.*

27. *Satian eha na akhiani jo marhian lagg jallan, Nanak satian janiann je birahe chot marran. Nanak so satian janiann sil santokh rahann.*

*dignified and virtuous manner.*"<sup>27</sup>

This revelation of the Guru firstly, deprecates sati through cremation of the living wife and secondly, approves of an enlightened observation in the classical Sanskrit text, *Bhartriharinirvedam*, of Harihar Upadhaya (10.c.), wherein queen Bhannumati tells her husband Bhartrihari that for a truly virtuous wife it is unnecessary to mount a funeral pyre alive, and subsequently she proves it by dying of shock on hearing of the fatal news of the death of her husband. Thirdly, the Guru explains the Sikh doctrine on sati by upholding the high Hindu idealism implicit in sati, and by deepening and interiorising its meaning which cleans the ideal of all its objectionable features relating to burning of the living wife. Never before or since in history has a lofty human ideal, thus been so firmly upheld and repudiated simultaneously.

## XI

The question of social status of woman and her political rights is distinct and distinguishable from her capacity and right to full religious experience and to administer religion's ecclesiastical and church affairs. The one concerns social and political customs and prejudices and the other the innate capability of the human female to control and guide institutions and organisations of religion. While in almost all the higher world-religions, the capacity of woman to participate in the highest levels of religious experience is conceded, her innate capacity to guide and control institutions of religion is not so conceded. The reason for this denial is stated not as custom, tradition or political exigency, but her psychological structure and innate disability arising out of the 'female-principle' of the Creation. "Under no circumstances must a

woman be permitted to hold a position of authority over others or control of herself", *na satriyam scantantrayam arahant*<sup>28</sup> is the draconian rule laid down by Hindu law-givers. Gautam, the Buddha bemoaned before his confidential secretary, Ananda :

*"If women had not received permission to enter the Buddhist Order, the good religion would have lasted for a thousand years, but now, O, Ananda, because of women entrants, it will decay and wither after five hundred years."*<sup>29</sup>

The prestigious Bayadavi in his authoritative commentary on the *Koran*, says that,

*"Allah has preferred men to women in the matter of mental ability and their power for performance of duties"*<sup>30</sup>.

Sheikh Mohammad Hussain Makhloof, the Mufti of Egypt, in a *fatwa* (1952) had declared that,

*"There is no authority in Islamic social system for giving the women the right to vote and to be elected to Parliament owing to their inherently unstable nature, on the authority of Islamic law."*

In the synagogue the women are inactive participants in the worship-service and sit veiled on the women's side usually separated from the rest by an opaque lattice. Saint Paul carried over the rule of the synagogue into the Christian congregation that, women should keep silence in the churches. Today, this rule is still the basis of the refusal to ordain women as priests in the Roman Catholic Church. In startling contrast to these age-old and almost universal convictions and practices of mankind, Guru Amar

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28. *Manusmriti Baudhayansmriti, Gautamsmriti*

29. *Mahaparinibbansutta.*

30. *Anwar-ul-tanzil*

Dass, over four hundred years ago, appointed and ordained a large number of women preachers under the nomenclature of 'the Sacred Stools', *pirhian*, and it is on record that, at least one woman was ordained and appointed as a Sikh bishop, Mathura Devi, wife of Murari. This is a truly remarkable phenomenon in the history of world-religions and marks a most new insight into and makes a most liberal estimation of the innate capacities of woman in relation to the highest spheres of human activity, the religion.

## XII

How is 'revelation' different from literature and, is literary craftsmanship integral to and peculiar to each one of them, are questions that have occupied the subtlest and loftiest human minds throughout the history of religion. The cognoscenti now generally appreciate the distinction between 'the revelation' and 'literature'. Literature is of secular and rational origin while revelation is of divine inspiration. Literature is product of conflict within the writer himself while revelation, by an external suprahuman agency. Literature may be judged by its quality and effect while revelation is characterised by its autonomous validity, *svatesiddha* as the Hindus say. Guru Amar Dass makes most unambiguous pronouncement on the subject :

*"There is no utterly trustworthy guidance for man except the Divine revelation. Mere literature is infected with uncertainty and error for, its origin is no better than human, ever prone to misknowing."*<sup>31</sup>

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31. *Satguru bajhon hor kachi bani, kahinde dace sunade kace kacian akh vakhani.*

### XIII

In the holy Koran is staked the claim that it is inimitable, because it is revelation and not the creation of human mind. "If the mankind and the *jinn* gathered together to produce the like of this *Koran*, they could not produce the like thereof even if they should help one another" (17 : 89)

On the basis of his many theological works have been written on the subject of 'inimitability of *Koran*', *i' jazi-quran*. The claim is based on the holy book's literary craftsmanship, its rhyming prose, the principle of which has not yet been properly analysed. T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), the doyen of modern English literature, has introduced a literary craftsmanship in English poetry which has no precedent in English or other world-literatures. It has been given the name of 'Cyclic Technique in Poetry'. In this technique the problem is stated but is not resolved and ended. There is a halt and a recovery and a recurring branching off to come back to the topic by another road and from another angle. Here is an example :

*And, indeed there will be time,  
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,  
Rubbing its back on the window panes.  
There will be time, there will be time.  
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet.  
There will be time to murder and create.  
And time for all the works and days of hands,  
That lift and drop a question in your plate.*

It is T. S. Eliot too who has conspicuously broadened the

base of literature into theology and philosophy. Both of these features of Eliot's poetry appear to have been curiously forestalled in the revelations of Guru Amar Dass in the *Guru Granth* :

(1) *bhagtan ki chal nirali chal nirali bhagtan kerī bikhām marg chalāna.*

(2) *iha sohila sabad sohava, sabada sohava sada sohila satguru sunaia.*

(3) *jeko sikhū sat guru seti sanamukhu hovai, hovai ta sikhū. sanamukhu koi jiah rahai gurnale.*

(4) *Jiahu maile baharahu nirmal baharahy nirmal jiahu ta maile tini janam juai haria.*

Again, when Eliot, in his *Four Quarters*, speaks of "intersection of the Timelessness with Time", is he trying to say and convey what Guru Amar Dass reveals in his Anandu Ramkali, *eh man meria tu sada rahu hari nale ? O my mind , remain ever with God.'*

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